

by Patrick Vercoe

Ilford 1, Wycombe Wanderers 2

TRAILING FOR 75 minutes at Ilford on Saturday, Wycombe Wanderers snatched two undeserved points in the final 15 minutes phase, following their worst display of the current season.

I still find it difficult to comprehend that Wanderers actually won this game. They looked tired, jaded, uninterested in what was going on and at times as dangerous as a new nursery-toy.

Admittedly, the pitch on which they were forced to operate appeared as though it hadn't been rolled for at least a fortnight with the result that the ball bobbed and popped with regular monotony. However, that alone is no excuse for a Wycombe display against a team who have conceded 15 goals in their last five matches.

Ilford had so little to offer, it looked almost too easy; they made up for their large deficiency in skill by eager running. Unfortunately, Wanderers chose this afternoon to match the Ilford formula and the little amount of decent football to show itself came from Wycombe in the final 20 minutes.

Handicap

The first 45 minutes produced some putrid approach work by both teams. Wycombe, quite rightly, can argue that they were playing with the handicap of only two recognised strikers, Busby and Merrick, as both Tony Horseman and Keith Samuels were missing through injuries.

With Julian Lailey wearing the number nine shirt, but joining Baker and Thomas to make up the middle three, this left the Wycombe front-line desperately short of fire-power.

Ilford found themselves ahead after only 10 minutes. Clarke's run split open Wanderers' usually so sound defence and his hard, low cross was pushed up into the air by Maskell for Chappell to get his blond-head to the ball and nod

MATCH DETAILS

Ilford: James; Coleman, Eaglesham; Ellis, Steel, Penn; Clark, Smith, Chappell, Moore. Sub: D. Palmer.

Wycombe Wanderers: Maskell, Temel, Faulkner, Rundle, Gale; Baker, Thomas, Lailey; Worley, Busby, Merrick. Sub: Lane.

Corner — Ilford 3, Wycombe 5.

Free-kicks (conceded) Ilford 4, Wanderers 7.

Referee: Mr. K. Duff.

Ilford in front.

In the last few games it has slowly become apparent that Wanderers' reliable defence is beginning to lose its edge. It was noticeable at Ilford and again at Tooting that the coolness and precision of the defenders' work is missing. Also the lack of understanding is cause for alarm and even such a mediocre side as Ilford were able to create panic and gain admission to Wanderers' 18-yard box.

It is difficult to find the words to describe Wycombe's feeble first-half showing. Apart from

one Busby shot and a Worley drive there was very little else to commend Wanderers. They lacked organisation, intelligence when in possession and, perhaps, the most vital ingredient of all — enthusiasm for the game.

The opening act of the second half brought no respite to this lethargic performance. It is difficult to assess Wanderers' championship chances, they are now currently second in the table, when they struggle against the calibre of teams like Tooting, Ilford, Clapton and the such-like.

Destroy

When against this type of opposition, Wycombe should mercilessly destroy them with sparkling and free-flowing football. There was not even a grain of this at Newbury Park, although Wanderers did thankfully manage to lift the game out of boredom for the final 20 minutes.

In the 75th minute came an equaliser which would have done justice to a magician. Busby lofted a hopeful cross into the middle where Merrick headed back into the six-yard box and there was Worley flashing forward to tuck a neat half-volley under the bar.

With Barry Darvill, urgently signalling the time left to his team from the line, Wanderers suddenly sensed they could win both points. Just nine minutes remained, when Gale pumped a long centre into the Ilford box and although Merrick missed with his intended header, Thomas rushing forward met the ball on the first bounce and nodded it past the stranded James and displayed his joy to all and sundry.